EARTH DAY WRITING CONTEST 2012

Name: Trần Huy Hùng

University: Ho Chi Minh University of Technology

4th year student

Topic: Tell us about a pressing environmental issue (i.e.: global warming, renewable energy, urban sprawl, etc...) in your city. How would you go about addressing it?

Traffic congestion is a primary problem in Ho Chi Minh City. Every day the city's huge network of streets is overwhelmed by the number of cars, busses, and motor bikes participating in the traffic from dawn to dusk. The traffic jam not only increases the gasoline consumption citywide but also contributes much to the air pollution. The municipal department of transportation has been trying to address these issues for years with little success. As a regular commuter, I believe that the local government should make radical changes to the city, such as upgrading infrastructure, partially redesigning the city, and tackling the problem from common causes, to solve this public nuisance, its consequences and restore the city's serenity.

Heavy traffic volume, which results in a spike in fuel usage and air pollution, can be immensely cut by complete transformation on the city's infrastructure such as roads, bridges, tunnels, traffic signals, and public transportation.

Statistical data regarding the city's traffic can be used to implement a smarter traffic network. Roads, bridges, and tunnels can be specifically built to change their directions on specific times of the day, especially in the morning and the evening. Moreover, smart traffic signal that changes its duration depending on the traffic volume can be viewed as a practical solution against traffic congestion.

Also, creating new routes, tunnels and adding extra capacity such as new traffic lanes at potentially crowded places are effective ways at generating fluid traffic flows. This is paramount because lacking of roads and streets is one of the most people instinctively find repugnant when travelling. This, in conjunction with smart lanes mentioned above, can eliminate common bottlenecks on streets.

In addition, public transport such as buses and the like must have their own lanes so that they don't use spaces designated for other vehicles. New projects such as building a metro system that covers the entire city should be started next year to cope with the high demand for public transportation.

Local universities must provide innovative techniques that facilitate these plans and erase the risk of ineffectiveness, which is a common knowledge when it comes to government's efforts at solving problems. Good infrastructure enables quicker travel, thus people can spend less time on the roads. Fuel consumption and CO2 emissions are then scaled down.

While improving the city infrastructure is great against heavy traffic, light traffic can similarly be achieved from extensive alterations in the city planning and

management. Relocating the city's residential areas closer to working places and moving universities far away from city central are feasible solutions.

Relocating or zoning can be difficult. Companies and factories should build apartment complexes close to them so that their workers and employees can enjoy faster transition from home to work. Regulators should pass laws that give tax cuts to companies that offer nearby houses to their employees. Additionally, factories and industrial corporations need to move to less crowded districts, especially in Thu Duc and Tan Binh so that their workers do not have to travel into the city central for work.

Recent researches show that there is a direct link between high traffic flows and the soaring number of universities in an area. In the wake of the studies, city's universities and colleges should be moved to specific suburbs distant from the city central. This will sharply reduce tens of thousands of students commuting on the already strained traffic network every day. Furthermore, new school opening times can be revised to avoid rush hour traffic in early mornings and late afternoons.

Accordingly, these projects must be rigorously strategized to adapt to the city's daily traffic. The city council and regulators should issue consistent and up-to-date guidelines that help these programs become reality in the shortest amount of time. Under these new urban designs people don't have to waste time idling on stuck roads, thus they can save more on fuel and add less to the air pollution. Such lower energy usage and fuel fumes are identified as key factors in restoring the local environment.

Terrible traffic and its consequences can be even further decreased if the government defines the causes more broadly, which are inconsiderate driving behaviors, weak law enforcement, limited awareness of traffic jam locations…etc.

Policy makers and the police department should encourage careful driving and seek bans on callous drivers. This, therefore, shall deter drivers who usually break traffic laws and create traffic jams. Moreover, the number of traffic police officers should be increased to deal with the growing number of commuters. Revision of current traffic laws, too, is necessary in reducing traffic congestion.

Also, helicopters can be used to locate traffic jams and send police officers to clear bottlenecks as soon as they appear. Residents living in areas with high risk of heavy traffic should report to the local police precincts when they sense traffic trouble ahead. Road congestion incidents, thus, may be reduced as law enforcement is immediately available at jam sites.

These solutions, as important as previously mentioned approaches, can alleviate traffic congestion at most locations in the city. Local residents need to corporate with the law enforcement to leverage these plans. Terrible traffic, air pollution, and fuel consumption will, then, be substantially brought down to the new level.

In summary, legislators and the department of transportation should take a lead role in fighting traffic jam. They must ameliorate the city infrastructure, current urban design and the behaviors from commuters and law enforcement. Policies then should be carefully adopted to avoid unwanted corollary effects. Given these facts, it is sufficient to

abate the traffic congestion, along with fuel consumption and air pollution to a record level. The environment is, thus, conserved.